



News from the Office of ERIE COUNTY EXECUTIVE MARK POLONCARZ

NEWS RELEASE

April 23, 2020

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ERIE COUNTY SENIOR SERVICES, PARTNERS ANNOUNCE HEARTS AND HANDS IS READY TO ASSIST WITH TRANSPORTATION, DELIVERIES, AND MORE FOR THE SENIOR AND THE DISABLED COMMUNITIES

EC Office for People with Disabilities joins Senior Services, community partners in new effort

ERIE COUNTY, NY— Recently the Erie County Department of Senior Services, in conjunction with the Erie County Office for People with Disabilities, announced a partnership with Hearts and Hands: Faith in Action, the IDEA Center at the University at Buffalo, Wegmans and others to assist with transportation, deliveries, and social connection needs for seniors and the disabled. The Health Foundation for Western and Central New York, Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (“NFTA”) and AARP also support the effort to create opportunities for volunteers to connect older adults and people with disabilities to provide volunteer transportation for medical needs, grocery and essential needs delivery and social connections such as friendly phone calls. The new outreach effort has been well-received but more volunteers are needed.

“Buffalo is known as the City of Good Neighbors”, **said Patricia Watson, Board Chair of Hearts and Hands.** “We are seeing that first hand and are announcing with great gratitude and enthusiasm that Hearts and Hands: Faith in Action has received inquiries from more than 72 people and commitments from at least 30 volunteers.”

Watson added, “As Hearts and Hands and our partners in service reach out for volunteers, good neighbors from all over Erie County are responding to the call. We are certainly in uncharted waters, but one thing is evident: this pandemic has the potential to bring out the best in all of us. Many, many thanks to those who can join us as volunteers in helping our community stay strong and united as we get through this crisis together.”

Erie County Senior Services Commissioner David J. Shenk said, “The immediate response from volunteers across Erie County is inspiring. However, we still need more! Having this service come online is an excellent resource for two of our most vulnerable populations, seniors and the disabled.”

Thanks to the outpouring of support from the community and the onboarding of additional volunteers, Heart and Hands is now ready to accept additional care receivers across the county. Services are currently available for requests to provide transportation, shopping, delivery and phone based social interaction. If you know of an older adult or a person who is part of the disability community, please have them call Heart and Hands: Faith in Action at (716) 406-8311 to schedule an intake over the phone.

“When people have reliable access to the essential services they need, it can have a significantly positive impact on their overall health and wellbeing”, **said Nora OBrien-Suric, PhD, President, the Health Foundation for Western and Central New York.** “In the face of this pandemic, we know it is more important than ever to provide safe, accessible options for older adults and people with disabilities to connect with their communities. We are proud to support this initiative and help Hearts and Hands as they reach even more people in Western New York during these difficult times.”

In operation since 2002, Hearts and Hands: Faith in Action is a best efforts volunteer program available free of charge to care receivers and providing medical and social transportation, in-home services such as laundry, light housekeeping, and minor home repairs as well as caregiver respite services such as shopping and delivery, companionship, phone pals, and pet sitting to rural and suburban communities. In the new partnership Hearts and Hands has temporarily expanded their capacity and is working to serve all municipalities in Erie County to address the needs of the entire county during the COVID-19 pandemic. Services are temporarily limited to transportation, grocery and essential needs delivery, and friendly phone calls.

The volunteer application can be found at <https://www.hnhcares.org/> or by calling (716)-406-8311. Volunteers are reimbursed for mileage and have supplemental insurance coverage through Hearts and Hands. Volunteer safety is of utmost concern and all COVID-19 precautions are observed. Additional opportunities for volunteers to work from home are available.

Hearts and Hands is supported by the New York State Department of Transportation, Erie County Department of Senior Services, Niagara County Office for the Aging, United Way of Buffalo and Erie County, Health Foundation for Western and Central New York, Amherst Generations Foundation, Churr Family Foundation, Odd Fellow and Rebekah Foundation, John R. Oishei Foundation, multiple faith partners, and private donations.

This capacity initiative is specifically supported by a grant from the Health Foundation for Western and Central New York. The Health Foundation is an independent private foundation that advocates for continuous improvement in health and health care by investing in the people and organizations that serve young children and older adults.

For more information:

On the Erie County Department of Senior Services, visit <https://www2.erie.gov/seniorservices/>

On the Erie County Office for People with Disabilities, visit <https://www2.erie.gov/ecod/>

On Hearts and Hands, visit <https://www.hnhcares.org/>

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